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Affirmation

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR:
UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER CONCERNS
PO BOX 1021, EVANSTON, IL 60204-1021 * UMAFFIRMATION_AT_YAHOO.COM *
WWW.UMAFFIRM.ORG

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Join Affirmation at the RMN Convocation

Justice and Joy

Do you feel the need for individual growth and renewal? Wouldn't it be great to spend time with old friends and make new friends? You can do it all Sept. 4-7 at the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN)'s convocation, *Justice and Joy*, at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, CO.

Be prepared for exciting worship, mind-stretching learning, celebrating, organizing, nurturing and being with others who seek enlightenment of our denomination.

Go to www.rmnetwork.org/convo2009.asp or call the RMN office at 773-736-5526 for more information and to register.

Affirmation of course will be at the convocation. Several Council members are planning to attend. Please be sure to introduce yourself to any of us, so that if we don't already know you, we can become acquainted. A highlight of the weekend will be the Reception that Affirmation is sponsoring on Saturday evening. After dinner and a major plenary session, everyone is welcome to join us for a typical

(Convo...Continued on page 2)

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Investing in Our Future

BY:**By Jan Olson**

In the newsletter following General Conference last year (July 2008) I wrote an article about "Meeting Our Grandkids". In it, I related some of what I learned from the members of MoSAIC (Methodist Students for an All-Inclusive Church) that I met at General Conference. Such things as their preference for "Queer", texting is in, telephones are out, they want to act-up, their energy and enthusiasm is contagious, and they want to gather together without always having the means to do so. If you want to read the entire article, it can be found on Affirmation's website.

I understand that desire to be present at gatherings of like-minded people. My first Affirmation gathering I was there because of my partner and I spent the weekend working (actually hiding!) in the kitchen. I looked out on these people who were singing, laughing, crying and obviously loving one another. I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted what they had. When the late Mary Gaddis, well known by many of you and former Affirmation Co-spokesperson, at the end of the weekend put her arms around me as I sobbed and said, "I don't know you, but I think I

(Investing in Our Future...Continued on page 2)

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Affirmation (i.e., fabulous) Reception hosted by Council members.

Justice and Joy is the 10th Reconciling Ministries Network Convocation, and marks RMN's 25th anniversary. RMN has worked with Affirmation for many years as a partner in our General Conference coalition of progressive organizations. Join us for a great Labor Day weekend in the beauty of the Rocky Mountains.

(Investing in Our Future...Continued from page 1)

love you" I was hooked! From then on I looked forward to, and in many cases yearned for, the gatherings that were held twice a year. Affirmation became my family. I felt loved and accepted. I knew I could go to any number of people if I had a problem. To this day, my heart is uplifted with the thoughts and memories of those who gathered together. The joy I experience when I get to see them is immeasurable.

I could not always afford to go to those gatherings. Money was very scarce in those days. But thanks to help from Affirmation, individuals and the "travel pool" I was able to attend almost every gathering for many years. It is because of the help I received that I made a commitment last year to do what I could to help MoSAIC members when and where I can. I want them to experience the family gatherings like I did. It is why I asked for your help with donations to help members of MoSAIC attend the RMN Convo in Colorado over 2009 Labor Day weekend. At the time I made that request, the event seemed so far away. But now I find it is mere months away. So I am here to ask for your help. I am here to ask you to invest some of your resources in our future...because it is the younger people who will continue on with the fight when some of us "old-timers" are gone.

As I began to write this article and reminisce about my own experience, I decided it's time to "pay it forward". So here's the deal. My partner Nancy and I will match the single highest donation (up to \$500) made to Affirmation in response to this request. And like us, I'd like you to consider it above and beyond your regular donation to Affirmation. Yes, we want to get the young people to Convo, but we also need to have the funds to continue in our work. So, how about it? Are you ready to respond to our offer? Are you ready and willing to invest in Affirmation's future?

Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication.

Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Articles for consideration for publication may be submitted to: AffirmationNewsletter_at_yahogroups.com* All articles in this publication remain the property of Affirmation, and may be used only with written permission of Affirmation.

Co-Editors: Gary Shephard and Judy WestLee

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PO Box 1021 Evanston, IL 60204.

www.umaffirm.org

E-mail:

umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com*

Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God's beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses.



Affirmation Celebrates Recent Marriage Decisions

Released May 20, 2009

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Co-spokesperson

The season of Easter is a time of renewal, of love reborn, of hope rekindled, and of the resurrection of the One who is Life. This Easter, Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Concerns, joins with others in the larger faith community in celebrating the recent decisions affirming same-sex marriage. The Iowa Supreme Court's unanimous decision in the case of *Varnum v. Brien*, understands that different-sex and same-sex families have value and are to be legally recognized, honored, protected, and celebrated. Affirmation was an Amicus in the case that resulted in this ruling. Likewise, both the Vermont and Maine Legislatures and Governors have very wisely acknowledged that civil unions are not the same as marriage. All loving couples deserve equal status and protection. In addition, the legislative debates and decisions in New Hampshire and New York state legislatures are very encouraging.

This good news is not universally celebrated. Alas, people are generally resistant to change, even when that change is to a more caring and loving and equal society.

While some people will still say these decisions are opposed to 'God's Will', a clearer reading of the Scriptures does not support discrimination of same-sex individuals or couples. Rather, we are to celebrate and use all of our gifts for God's service in this world.

There will also be voices calling for popularist votes on this issue. Yet even in this Easter season we cannot forget the voices of Lent, and particularly of Holy Week. Those community actions so long ago show what can happen when mob rule takes over. Rarely does a society grant civil rights to the oppressed. It frequently takes strong individuals, such as currently sit in the Iowa Supreme Court and in the Maine and Vermont government, to guide our society into equality.

We recognize that these are civil decisions and not religious ones. We hope the United Methodists of Iowa, Maine, Vermont, and eventually the entire United Methodist Church, will be able to rejoice in these decisions and honor those who choose marriage for their lives. We pray for the best for all couples, both different-sex and same-sex, who decide to officially

Yes, Gay is Definitely OK...

Released June 23, 2009

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Co-spokesperson

As is the sexuality of all of God's children who are lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, straight, or queer!

Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns supports and congratulates the Reverend Diana Holbert, for her courage and strength in preaching the truth about homosexuality. Rev. Holbert is the pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX. While other clergy seek to continue spreading distortions of God's message, Rev. Holbert courageously preached the truth of God's gift of homosexuality. Her congregation is blessed to have this strong person as their pastoral leader. The United Methodist Church is blessed to have her as one of their clergy persons.

In true David vs. Goliath fashion, the Rev. Holbert

was willing to dispute the message coming out of a much larger congregation. As she prepared to do so the forces of ignorance rose up in fear. Her sermon was mocked even before she was able to preach it. Unable to stand the light of God's truth and love, those who obtain power by demeaning us sought to cloud the issue by questioning her message. Rev. Holbert persevered with preaching God's message to her congregation.

We applaud the Rev. Holbert for her courage to speak out. We hope her shining example will empower others within this denomination and in all faith traditions to recognize God's love of this varied gift of sexuality. Love of another person is indeed a rich gift from God. Let us all celebrate it and proclaim its value.

Remembering Bishop Melvin Wheatley

By Tim Tennant-Jayne, Cospokesperson

Our denomination recently lost a great prophet. I use this title in the biblical sense of someone who calls us back to faithfulness to God's Will, rather than the idea of someone able to foretell the future. Retired United Methodist Bishop Melvin E. Wheatley, Jr., died March 1, 2009, at the age of 93, in Mission Viejo, CA.

Many people have already written about this great man and visionary leader. Google his name and numerous article links will be available. Bishop Wheatley served as the bishop of the Colorado area United Methodist conference for several years, and was a pioneer proponent of Lesbian and Gay equality in The United Methodist Church.

In 1978, Bishop Wheatley disagreed with his fellow bishops about the denomination's official stance about homosexuality. He was very public about his disagreement. He would not allow them to cover up the fact that the bishops did not all agree. His speech to his fellow bishops is a powerful statement of God's love and intended direction for this denomination. Bishop Wheatley recognized that the words in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline* were "naive, harsh and categorically false". "Therefore: not only is it impossible for me to consent to add

my name to any such public pronouncement as here proposed, but also it is imperative for me, out of my own sense of integrity, to insist that any such public pronouncement with which I could be connected carry the unmistakable message that the vote that launched it was not unanimous."

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In the early 1980's, Bishop Wheatley defended the appointment of an openly gay man, the Rev. Julian Rush, to a parish. Because of this action, a few people charged Bishop Wheatley with heresy and disobedience to the *Discipline*. However, a committee found no "reasonable grounds" for accusing him. Throughout his life, Bishop Wheatley and his wife, Lucile, continued to advocate for the equality of all persons in the church which they so loved.

I particularly recall Bishop and Mrs. Wheatley at an Affirmation gathering in the late 1980's. There was

a great sense of respect, thankfulness, appreciation, and joy at their presence among us.

To set the stage a bit, this was a depressing time for many in Affirmation. Each General

(Remembering Bishop Wheatley...Continued on page 6)

Anonymous Letter to a Bishop

Editors' Note: This was written to a particular bishop. Before it was sent, the writer had second thoughts about possible retribution against the pastor of the writer's church. The letter has been edited to remove any identifying details. We long for the day when this will no longer be necessary.

Dear Bishop [name of bishop deleted]:

I was at GC 2000. When the discussion came down to sexual orientation, it wasn't pretty.

I was at GC 2004. We couldn't even agree on putting a paragraph in the Discipline that we are not of one mind regarding homosexuality. We obviously aren't, but we couldn't even come together in our difference long enough to agree that we disagree.

I sat through that incredibly arduous discussion of paragraph 161(g) in 2008. I'm not that much of a parliamentarian, but I've been told that there were lapses in procedure that probably came from efforts to make the discussion bog down.

Yet I stay in the United Methodist Church. For reasons that defy explanation, I have a love for the UMC and especially for [name of church deleted].

[This paragraph contained church identifying detail. It was moving and heartfelt. There was no way to disguise the church identity, district, or conference.]

I'm gay if you haven't figured that out yet. Born gay. I certainly didn't choose this. No one in their right mind would just wake up one day and say, "Gee, life's been a bit dull. I think I'll join the most vilified, maligned, hated, reviled,

despised, persecuted, mistreated and misunderstood minority in the history of human kind." Rather my decision years ago was to acknowledge my difference and live a life of honesty and integrity.

And the UMC continues to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear. Instead of our denomination becoming more open and accepting as our understanding of the origin of sexual orientation develops, we continue to careen down the path of ignorance. Our church wears blinders and earplugs and hopes the uncomfortable issues will go away.

Logic should dictate that at some point I would just cut my losses, pack my camel and head for a more welcoming denomination.

It's not that simple.

First, my mother always held me to a high standard of excellence. She didn't raise me to be a quitter.

Second, I'd be setting a horrible example. "If there's a constituency the denomination doesn't like, just turn up the heat until they all leave."

Well, that's a denomination that doesn't model Christ, and I'm certainly not going to reinforce that sort of ill behavior by leaving.

Third, I'll not consign myself to a ghetto. The only way society and our church will ever come to understand persons of differing sexual

orientations is if they meet us, know us as persons, know our life stories, and our faith journeys. They need to know we're not some stereotype they see on TV or in the movies. We're real people, and when we're talked about or

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(Anonymous Letter...Continued on page 7)

GC 2008 Contribution Premiums OUT! (Finally)

By Gary Shephard

I do apologize. I didn't realize being local point for this GC and co-editing the daily GC newsletter would so consume my life. Every day during GC, I crawled out of bed at 5:30 am, and sometime around midnight I collapsed back into bed. In between was spent travelling between home, the convention center, and area stores of every description, handing out newsletters, editing and submitted the newsletter for printing, chasing down things people needed because I knew where the stores were, and trying just to keep up with everything I was supposed to keep up with.

I dropped the ball on three things.

One was getting out the GC contribution premiums on a timely basis. They all went out in March. I was so late getting them out (thanks to all of the ruckus at my day job post GC) I decided that everybody that made a contribution that could be identified as being for GC should at least get an OUTIE and a selection of our vintage bookmarks.

The second was missing two newsletter day sponsors. These are noted in a side bar.

And the third was not snail mailing the paper newsletters to the people who had requested them.

Next GC I won't be local point (unless I find some strange urge to pick up and move to Tampa), and I'll do a much better job of getting the snail mailed newsletters in the mail every day and taking care of the newsletter day sponsors.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding.

Daily GC Newsletter Day Sponsors

We had two daily GC day sponsors that didn't get credited in the newsletters.

In memory of Mary Gaddis

San Rafael First UMC, Rev. Dr. Liza Klein,
Pastor

(Remembering Bishop Wheatley...Continued from page 4)
Conference brought an increasing number of restrictive rulings against queer persons being in the church. AIDS was clearly taking a toll on our family. And after the death of a retired United Methodist bishop to AIDS, his family claimed that he must have become infected with the virus through praying with persons in the hospital, a statement about which the denomination was thunderously silent.

And so, in the midst of all of this, to have a supportive bishop come and spend time with we whom the church rejected, felt so very,

very powerful. People kept coming up to the Wheatley's and thanking them for their presence. And each person had a story about how the Church had mistreated them. The Wheatley's listened to each person and offered support. Bishop Wheatley was a speaker that weekend. But it was their presence among us that was the true highlight.

The prophetic voice itself may now be silent. However, we will not allow the message to be forgotten. Affirmation celebrates the life, words, and ministry of Bishop Melvin Wheatley.

Affirmation National Council

Diane DeLap, Co-spokesperson
Wilmington, MA
[redacted]

Lyn Ellis, Co-coordinator
Columbus, OH
[redacted]

Stephen Mallett, Co-coordinator
Nashville TN
[redacted]

Jan DeLap
Wilmington, MA
[redacted]

Walter Lockhart
Minneapolis, MN
[redacted]

Rev. Tim Tennant-Jayne,
Co-spokesperson
Minneapolis, MN
[redacted]

*** Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "_at_" in the email addresses above.**

(Anonymous Letter...Continued from page 5)

to in a hurtful manner, we experience real pain. When our faith journeys are not taken seriously, the body of Christ is wounded. People at a distance are too easy to demonize and regard as "the other."

So, I'll be staying. I'll continue praying for the heart of the denomination. I'll still be active at [name of church deleted].

We're real people and when we're talked about or to in a hurtful manner, we experience real pain. When our faith journeys are not taken seriously, the body of Christ is wounded. People at a distance are too easy to demonize and regard as "the other."

That's one more reason why I'll never leave. I consider my continued presence in the UMC a witness to this next generation.

I'll see you at Annual Conference.

Respectfully yours,

[Name deleted]
Lay Delegate
[Church name deleted]

Look for me at Annual Conference in the [name of church deleted] delegation. I'll be wearing my [identifiable article of clothing deleted]. For someone as introverted and conflict averse as myself, this is a big thing. I've done it now for several years, and so far the roofs of the halls where we've had annual conference haven't yet fallen. There's such a need for everyone at AC to know that if I weren't already a member of the denomination, there's a good chance the door would be closed, or I wouldn't even attempt to join.

We as a denomination need to realize we're setting a horrible precedent and leaving a terrible legacy for the children baptized in our denomination that, as they grow up, are realizing they're part of this horrible "other," that can be excluded from membership, or that can't have their pastor solemnize their relationship.

Updated Brochures Available

The Affirmation brochure has been updated post GC 2008. If you'd like to help spread the word about Affirmation, let us know. We'll print and mail you a few. Keep in mind printing time. (The brochures take a fair amount of time to print.) Send an email with "Brochures" in the subject line to: umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com or umaffirmationeadmn_at_prodigy.net

Or drop us a line at:

Affirmation
PO Box 1021
Evanston IL 60204-1021

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Affirmation Council Strategizes

The United Methodist Church is hosting a party in Tampa, Florida (a.k.a. General Conference 2012). So this April the Affirmation Council met to plan our own unique flavor for this party. Usually we meet in a Council member's home community in order to save the travel and housing expense of at least one member. However, we felt it was important to check out Tampa.

We stayed at the hotel reserved by the progressive Coalition of Affirmation, Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) [nice rooms, pleasant staff, heavy use of air conditioning and heavenly chocolate desserts]. We spent one morning walking around the Convention Center site of the Conference [lots of stairs, a few elevators, easy walk from the hotel and right on the river]. We also checked out the local transit system, explored some possible sites for Affirmation sponsored events, and made some great local faith-based queer contacts.

We also elected three new Council members: Laci Adams, Jan DeLap and Walter Lockhart. Due to the resignation of one member, Stephen Mallett was selected as one of our Co-coordinators. Walter agreed to be Finance Manager. We planned our 2009 Christmas Cards (no folks, you can't get those awesome Affirmation Christmas Cards at regular card stores. They take planning and work.) We discussed the budget and fundraising.

The Council also discussed changes to our By-Laws. We will soon present these suggestions to the membership. Among these is a discussion of adapting our name. We will, of course, remain Affirmation. However, should we be just "United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns" or recognize the value of others in the Queer umbrella and name them? This includes Allies and Intersexed persons. Council members covenanted to study and pray about this issue, as well as seek the opinions of the membership.

And back to the parties. We also planned our presence at the upcoming RMN Convocation 2009 (see article elsewhere) and an Affirmation family gathering in the fall of 2010. This will celebrate our 35th birthday. Details to follow.

Council Member Intro: Stephen Mallett

Stephen was elected to the council last October.

Stephen graduated from Chicago Theological Seminary in 1973, and soon became involved in Sexual Attitude Reassessment workshops focusing on sex role stereotyping. He represented Belmont UMC at the National RMN Convocation in 2005, and returned to his local church to begin a Reconciling Task Force later that year. Stephen is a founding member of the new Nashville Area Reconciling Ministry formed to offer a reconciling body for those United Methodists in Tennessee who do not have a reconciling church available.

His goals include changing attitudes so that United Methodists begin to move from tolerance or mere acceptance to positions of nurturance and celebration of persons of all gender identities and sexual orientations.



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PO Box 1021; Evanston, IL 60204

www.umaffirm.org

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UMCalledOut>